

# UCLan RKE Institute for Area & Migration Studies (AMIS) Seminar Series 2025

## AMIS Seminar

### “Reading Animals and Animality in Antebellum U.S. Slave Narratives” by Aïcha Bouchelaghem (University of Geneva, Visiting Fellow Institute for Black Atlantic Research)



This talk provides an insight into my doctoral research, which examines the forms and functions of the figure of the ‘animal’ in African American Antebellum slave narratives (autobiographies of formerly enslaved individuals composed before 1865). Nonhuman animals are present in slave narratives both in the form of actual animals who exist in the story-world and intervene in the plot, and as figurative entities that signify human characteristics, or traits that these narratives precisely claim to be missing in ‘humans.’ My thesis addresses narratives that figure animality or specific ‘animals’ as ‘more-than-human’; in this context, ‘more-than-human’ means beyond the reach of human strength, affect, cognition, and overall control. African

American autobiographers derive textual authority from what they present as their capacity to foreground or explicitly interpret animals’ more-than-human agency. To read animals and animality in this genre and in this area (the United States) requires distinguishing between “animality studies” and other projects associated with “animal studies,” by drawing on the classification outlined by Michael Lundblad (2017). Indeed, the discursive function of animality in slave narratives cannot be apprehended fully through a methodology that seeks animal welfare or the critique of the humanist Enlightenment subject. Nevertheless, some texts do construct an animal ethics, even if that is not their primary project.

Image: “Crossing the River on Horseback in the Night.” In: William Still. *The Underground Railroad. A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c....* Revised edition. Philadelphia, PA: People’s Publishing Company, 1871, p. 121

**26 March 2025, 4-5 pm in Adelphi Lecture Theatre 5**  
to join online, please follow this link to [Microsoft TEAMS](#)

Attendance is free

Hosted by the RKE Institute for Area & Migration Studies (AMIS)

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